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AUTHOR	Rosenbluth, Leon
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ABSTRACT

For the fiscal year 1975-1976, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) funds were distributed as follows: 30% for syndicated data, 32% for commercial research firms, 15% for consultants, 12% for local research at stations, and 11% for university grants. The major area for research was in new program development and directed toward discovering viewing preferences pilot programs. In the year ahead, projects will include: examining the flow of audiences throughout the time periods and days of the week; developing a computer model to predict program ratings; holding station workshops on how to use available data; setting up a viewing panel to evaluate programming; and establishing an historical archive of research data. (DAG)

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RESEARCH OUTLOOK AT CPB

Given at NAEB Convention

October 26, 1976

Chicago, Illinois

by Leon Rosenbluth

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It has been a year since I addressed this NAEB Conference. Well, what kind of a year has the past one really been?

It has been a year in which I personally learned a great deal and one of the more critical things I learned was that working in the commercial or profit sector as I had, was like playing with Mary Poppins compared to working in public broadcasting which is akin to playing tag with Machiavelli.

But; despite the frustrations, the controversies, the political maneuverings, and the special interest group pressures -- certain things have been accomplished. During this session, I will bring you up to date on these things as well as share our plans for research within the coming year.

If I were to characterize the past year, I would say it was the "year of planning" wherein we planned, collected and experimented with data and ideas. The coming year might well be called the year of publishing -- wherein CPB will be publishing a great quantity of data related to public broadcasting.

The past year has been one which saw the controversy over the definition of a PTV viewer find its way into print and as yet that controversy remains unresolved. I had hoped the research council would have responded to my request that they consider this problem important enough to convene a committee, a seminar, or a conference to discuss and explore the related issues. I received no response to that invitation -- I had thought at least one member of the council would have inquired whether CPB would fund such a conference -- but, not a word.

For those of you who do not know what I am referring to, I'll

take a minute to review. How to best define a PTV viewer has never been standardized. In a paper CPB published, the definition of the PTV viewer was acclaimed one based on how many shows were watched on PTV in the past 4 weeks. It was intended as a broad and rather loose definition. Karen Farr, Research Director of WNET, published in the May-June issue of PTR a critique of the CPB paper -- I replied with an article in the subsequent issue of PTR that would be July-August. In my article I called for the Research Council to discuss the question of standards for defining a viewer but no one responded. I was led to believe the issue would be on the agenda of the Research Council meeting held on October 25. I flew in yesterday in time to attend that Council meeting. The issue was not on the agenda. I brought up the problem and requested once again that the Research Council discuss it. I discovered that some of the powers that rule the Council seem to have little knowledge of and perhaps no interest in dealing with how a PTV viewer should be defined for different uses. I am fully aware that there can and should be several different levels of viewer definition -- each relevant to a particular study or investigation. My request was merely to have the Council, a relatively newly formed group, make some attempt to outline or define the differing definition standards that the industry may use. Rather than force the issue to a vote in the Council, I walked out of the meeting -- frustrated and a little angry. I hereby repeat that suggestion and reissue that invitation; not the funding part, but the conference possibility.

The past year also saw the publication of what has now become famous as the Katzman report -- the real title being "Program

Decisions in Public Television" -- the publication of this document was not done by either of its contributing funders (CPB and NCES) but through the good and kind offices of NAEB.

This was the year the FCC made its historic ruling requiring noncommercial broadcasters to ascertain within their community. Following this, CPB issued its Ascertainment Handbook which by this time all stations should have in hand. It is still too early to tell what impact this FCC decision will have on programming.

It was also a year that saw, for the first time in many years, a full 15 member compliment for the CPB Board of Directors. This was the year that PBS installed a new President.

It is a year that gave Public Television its record high monthly cume of 55.2% achieved for the month of March 1976. Associated with this record high monthly cume PTV also achieved its highest average weekly cume of 37.5% for the same month. These represent increases of 20 and 19 percent, respectively, over the same period a year before. This was the year the Satellite contract was awarded.

This was the year that, for the first time, CPB funded a study on the impact and utilization of the Ascent of Man series as a course for credit in colleges across the country. Marjorie Hoachlander is Director of that project and it seems to be progressing nicely.

It was also the year that we funded the entire research effort connected with the Over Easy program -- a series for the elderly -- produced by KQED in San Francisco; from what I have heard, this was a most successful project. The final report should be in my office in a couple of weeks.

Last, but not least, it was a year that saw the CPB office of Communication Research withdraw from participation in the NAEB Conference and then negotiate reappearance with the management of NAEB and the Conference. This last phenomenon is responsible for the fact that I do not have the slides that should accompany this talk, and thus, you will have to put up with verbal images rather than visual pictures.

Now I would like to get into some of the details of where we have been, what we have done, and where we are going. Lest anyone have in his hot little hands a draft of the talk I gave last year for the express purpose of pointing out any promises I did not fulfill or mention, be assured that in drafting this appearance, I went over that speech very carefully to make sure I would cover all of the promises made. (See how much I have learned in just one year).

First let me give you a rundown on where the money went by the types of contractors who received grants for the research we did in fiscal 75-76. The total amount of money spent was just over $500 thousand. In terms of the distribution of types of contractors -- 30% of the budget was spent for syndicated data (this includes Nielsen and ARB data as well as the Roper and Yankelovich services), 32% of the funds went to commercial research firms, 15% of the funds were given out for consultants of various kinds, 12% went to stations in support of their local research efforts, and 11% went as grants to universities or academics. In accounting for these funds, the grants given to a station which was licensed to a University or other Academic Institutions were coded as going to the station. Thus, there

is some overlap in this distribution.

The major priority and consequently the first major area in which we sought research help was in the area of new program development. I mentioned that we had bought the Yankelovich and Roper Reports -- the latter being one of the bones of contention regarding the definition of PTV viewers. These syndicated reports contain much valuable information which has not yet been fully analyzed, nor for that matter, fully collated. Part of what will be accomplished in the coming year is to develop a proper format for disseminating this information in a way that will be most useful to public broadcasting entities. We have already circulated information from the Roper Reports and the Yankelovich Monitor study internally at CPB and to NPR as well as sharing the full data with PBS.

In addition to purchasing the Roper and Yankelovich data, we delved into an experiment in National Ascertainment using the R.H. Bruskin syndicated national omnibus. This study, using a 2500 head of household national cross section, investigated the degree of interest in various program type subject areas -- such as documentaries, sports, situation comedies, movies, etc. -- there are 33 such areas in the study. In addition, respondents were questioned on their needs, problems, and interests. In order to experiment with program concept research, the Bruskin National Ascertainment Study also involved asking people for their degree of interest in watching specific programs as defined by a program concept. There were 42 such program concepts used. The vast majority of which were taken from the SPC III roster of programs plus a number of concepts which the TV activities department asked us to include.

Additionally, the PTV viewer questions which were used in the Roper studies were also administered. Thus, we are able to analyze program preferences and program concepts as well as problems and needs by viewers and non-viewers of public television in a very broad sense.

Respondents were asked to indicate their degree of interest in watching each of the program types using a scale running from very interested to not interested at all. The top ten program types respondents said they were "very interested" in watching were almost identical for both the viewers and non-viewers of PTV with some very important exceptions.

Among the PTV viewers the top 10 program types are:

Current news, current movies, wildlife and nature shows, documentaries, sports, public affairs, situation comedies, mystery and detective, oldtime movies, and comedy variety shows

Among the non-PTV viewers the top 10 program types are:

Current news, current movies, mystery and detective, wildlife and nature, situation comedies, sports, comedy variety, oldtime movies/action adventure, and musical varieties

The program type which is 11th among the non-viewers is Public Affairs.

Thus, we see that in general the PTV viewers are not so radically different in their viewing interests from non-PTV viewers with, of course, a couple of very notable exceptions both in specific program types and in the rank ordering. Eight out of the top ten program

types which PTV viewers say that are "very interested" in watching also appear on the non-viewer list. The two which do not appear, however, are indeed halmarks of Public Television -- Documentaries and Public Affairs. The two program types which appear on the non-viewer list -- Action Adventure and Musical Variety -- but do not appear on the PTV viewer list might well be catagorized as quite representative of the commercial TV fare. It is also important to note the rank ordering of those program types which are common to both lists -- for example: Mystery and Adventure ranks 3rd on the non-viewer list and 8th amongh PTV viewers. Situation Comedies ranks 5th among non-viewers and 7th among viewers.

There are also some identical rankings and some which are very close -- Current News and Current Movies rank number 1 and 2, respectively on both lists, Wildlife and Nature ranks 3rd among PTV viewers and 4th amongh non-viewers.

These data, even in this crude analysis, tell us something about how we might attract the non-viewer -- certainly current movies would seem to attract across the board, but a wildlife and nature series might well be successful in increasing our penetration among those who confess to being non-viewers of public television.

A word about the number 1 program type. Current News, which appears as number 1 on both lists is indeed congruent with the ratings which current news programs receive. You might suspect that this particular program type is the one which everyone must say they are very interested in partly to impress the interviewer and partly to impress themselves. But, people do watch it -- the Gross Ratings of New Programs -- combining all three networks, Early

Evening News is about 30+. The highest rated program series is just about the same. But if we added in the Late Evening News, the total Gross Ratings for current news would make it the top rated subject on TV.

The program types which are at the bottom of the list for both PTV and non-PTV viewers are Opera and Ballet, Arts and Artists, and Discussions about the Stock Market -- No comment.

Programs which are for and about minorities receive very little viewing interest support from the white respondents -- view interest is at a level of 3%. However, it receives considerable support from the non-white respondents -- 28% of whom indicate they would be very interested in watching those kinds of programs.

In looking at the specific program concepts, there are several which both PTV viewers and non-viewers say they would "make a special effort to Watch". These programs are:

American Musical Theater - A series presenting original musical plays specifically written for television by American writers.

Broad Stripes, Bright Stars - A dramatic portrayal of early American history and life in American free of the stereotypes and biases, glamorized images and falsehoods.

Portrait of America - A series of programs portraying different aspects of America as seen by some of its most famous writers, poets and essayists. This is the program that Norman Lear is currently working on.

How Does Your Garden Grow - This is obviously a program about gardening and how to grow plants in various parts of the country.

How We Got Here - A series of programs which tell the story of the many groups of people who left their native lands to settle in the New World.

Utilizing these data we will be able, in the coming year, to segment the audiences for various program types and get some indication of the validation of these segments by analysing them against specific program concepts. It does not require a great deal of imagination to see the value of these data in developing programs and in finding out more about our audiences.

Before I leave the Bruskin Study, I would like to share with you a couple of the findings about what the public considers serious problems facing this county. The number one problem according to both PTV and non-PTV viewers is inflation, the cost of living and food prices. The number two problem appears to be abuse of drugs and drugs in schools. Unemployment, the problem which Mr. Carter is hitting so hard ranks 5th on the list and integrity in government occupies 6th place.

These data, in my opinion, speak to public broadcasting addressing the entire economics issue.

The next major area mentioned last year was the testing of pilot programs. Unfortunately, we had very few pilots to test but there was one notable test which was designed to evaluate three Black Cultural programs in order to select one for series funding. Lest you feel that research may wield an undue influence on the decisions made for funding programs let me tell you that the Black Cultural pilot which was most popular among the black whom we sampled was not chosen by the advisory panel for series funding.

The program which was chosen actually came in second. That program was chosen for reasons other than its potential popularity among the black audiences.

This Black Cultural pilot test was carried out by airing the pilots in four cities across the county. Each of the programs was aired in each of the cities on different nights -- preferably consecutive nights although this was not achievable in every case. Interviews were then administered within 24 hours of airing the program. In addition, two separate samples were used -- one was recruited black audience for the programs and the other sample, running concurrently was gotten up by random phone calls to census areas containing a majority of black households. The recruited sample in each city was asked to view all three programs -- although they were interviewed after each viewing. The random samples were obtained for each of the pilots thus, there were three random samples and one recruited sample. The random samples provided a check on the possible conditioning effect of recruiting an audience as well as asking that recruited audience to view each of three programs on three separate evenings.

In both the recruited sample and the random samples the same show came out on top. We are talking to the producers of this show, in this case WTTW here in Chicago, about whether it might be possible to turn that winning show into a series for all minorities -- not just the blacks. Thus, research played an important part in evaluating the programs even if it did not convince the advisory panel about which show to choose.

CPB has increased its purchasing of rating data -- Nielsen and

ARB. During the past year, we have purchased the County by County data from both Neilsen and ARB. This purchase allows us to look at audiences for those TV stations which are non-reportable for whatever reasons -- the main reason being that no station will be reported if it does not achieve a .5 rating within the DMI or ADI in which it must qualify.

A substantial portion of next years budget is devoted to the purchasing of rating data. The March 1976 cume data has just arrived and I'd like to share some of the findings with you now even though much of it will be published in about a month. The five highest rated series on Public Television as measured for the month of March are:

The Adams Chronicles with an average audience rating of 4.8 and a cume of 10.6. With respect to the actual viewing of episodes we learn that 42% of those who watched this series saw only one of the four episodes in March and 24% saw two episodes. So, two-thirds of the viewers of the Adam's Chronicles saw two of the four episodes. This may be, because in March the series was portraying some of the less interesting members of the Adams family.

The next highest rated series was Masterpiece Theatre which was showing Upstairs/Downstairs. The ratings here were an AA of 4.8 and a cume of 10.2. With respect to episodes, 53% watched only one of the four episodes broadcast in March.

Nova was the next series achieving a top rating with an AA of 3.0 and a cume of 10.5. Here 63% watched only one episode but this is perhaps more understandable since each episode stands alone. The fourth ranked program series was Washington Week in Review with

an AA of 2.0 and a cume of 5.2. Note that with a public affairs show the cume drops precipitously because of its special nature.

The 5th ranked series was Great Performances with an AA of 1.8 and a cume of 7.5. With this program series 79% of the audience watched only one of the four performances. This does demonstrate the extreme selectivity of the PTV viewer but is also related to the fact that not everyone is interested in all the different type of Great Performances.

The five lowest rated series for the Month of March 1976 are: Behind the Lines, Antiques, Black Journal, Woman, and Woman Alive. The Black Journal rating is somehow understandable but the ratings for Woman and Woman Alive are not so comprehensible given the huge clamor for women's programming.

While we achieved the record high cume audience in March 1976, nevertheless, it was an atypical month to some extent because the fund raising festival took place during that period.

The five highest specials -- all of which were aired during the festival were: The Incredible Machine, Boston Pops in Hollywood, Good Old Days of Radio, It's Hard to be a Penguin, and Sing America Sing.

The five lowest specials were: Presidential Forum in Miami, Hemingway Play, I Regret Nothing, The Ragtime Years, and Benito Mussolini-My Husband.

All of this information will be published within the next couple of months and I am sure that many of you have already received Allan Cooper's memos on the subject. There is a wealth

of information in the March Nielsen NTI, much of which Allan does not cover in his very excellent analyses. CPB would like to publish this information, but we will need permission from the Nielsen company to do so. That particular problem will be addressed with all possible speed.

I will not dwell on our Ascertainment activities because that has been covered most adequately in these sessions. Suffice to say that the FCC did not give us the experimental year we asked for in our filing, but they did give us time to get the Ascertainment Handbook published and mailed. I assume that most of you who are connected with the stations or Universities have already received your copies. If you do not receive your copy, please contact my office and we will mail one to you.

This brings me to the area of local station support. I had mentioned last year that I wanted to set up regional resource centers around the country to allow stations to consult with experts in the research area. This has not yet come to pass and it may be another year before something like that gets off the ground. Budget does not permit it at this time.

During the past year, we have funded several studies through local stations. A main one being Charlotte, North Carolina. That study is finished and the final report has been delivered to my office about two weeks ago. It is being assessed and reviewed for the value it may have to other stations in the system. The study was a very comprehensive examination of the local audience, including areas of ascertainment as well as attitudes toward programming. It may indeed serve as a model for other stations to follow in dealing

with their own communities. There is one fact which should be noted in connection with that study. When I funded the study, I insisted that the volunteers be used in whatever capacity they could -- feeling that one area which could utilize volunteer services would be interviewing. The station promised they would employ the station volunteers and even proceeded to do so. This became a case, however, where the entire volunteer participation fell apart. It was clear that volunteers could not handle the job and one of the main reasons was the lack of real motivation on their part. A volunteer is generally motivated to being most kind and cordial to the public and yet in conducting a survey the interviewer is supposed to be polite but firm. Unfortunately, the volunteers were not firm and if anything were overpolite. Consequently, the hang up rate and the refusal rate soared. It is yet another example of where the volunteers were unable to carry out their responsibility -- not really due to any inherent fault of their own, but because they do not necessarily have the temperment nor the experience to be good interviewers. When that system of interviewing fell apart, the study had to be completed with paid professionals. I have the research firms analysis of what happened and this will be included in the report we publish.

Last year, I had promised to investigate the effect of cable on PTV. Well, nothing has really been done in that area, consequently, the budget this year contains a substantial sum to research the cable effects.

I believe, I have covered all of the important areas raised in my report to this convention last year, so we can dispense with

looking backward and concentrate now on the year ahead.

Let's take a brief look at what we have in store for the coming fiscal year.

Besides the normal functioning of the Office of Communications Research in doing such things as program evaluation, supporting the SIP Festival 77 (both radio and TV), plus evaluation of all pilots prior to a funding decision, OCR will be engaged in publishing the data we now have in hand and will be embarking on some interesting new projects.

I am quite excited about several projects we have in mind as well as a few which are already underway.

One of them involves using the ARB TV data and will allow us to examine the flow of audience throughout the time periods and days of the week. How much of the previous programs audience stays for the next PTV program? ARB has a system known as AID which is the acronym for ARBITRON INFORMATION on DEMAND. It is a computer program which allows access to the diary data from any and all markets. In addition to flow, the system allows a complete analysis of the characteristics of the audience for any of our programs. Rather than go further into this system, there is a session on AID in which David LeRoy will fully explain its workings and uses. I would not want to steal David's thunder after he has worked so diligently on the presentation. So, if anyone wants to learn more about the AID system, attend David's session tomorrow at 3:15. The AID system will be available to any stations which want to use it and we are currently working out the logistics of such use.

Another project which holds some real promise for PTV is the development of a computer model which would predict (within given error limits) the rating of a particular program. The commercial networks have had this kind of a model for a long time and PTV is now grown up enough to experiment with developing one. The contract I have given out is solely for determining the feasibility of constructing such a model given the peculiarities of Public Television. I will be able to report on the progress of this project in a couple of months.

During the next year, we will be holding TV and Radio Workshops which will be designed to show stations how to use the rating data that is available to them. We are well aware that utilization of the data, which CPB pays for, is at a relatively low level and is primarily concentrated in the large community based stations. There is much that a small station can do with rating data and we are hoping the work-shops will stimulate both high interest and increased use.

In the area of radio research, there will be some stepped up activity. In the first place, I have just hired Tom Church as a Senior Research Analyst. Tom comes to CPB from ARB where he worked primarily in radio and thus, is most knowledgeable on that subject. Already, in the works is a project which would parallel the Program Content survey which gives data on one week in Public Television. The project we are already involved in with radio will provide data on "One Week in Public Radio".

A project which I had heretofore resisted but now feel may be necessary will be in the design stage during the next year. This

project will be to set up a natural viewing panel to allow us to evaluate the current programming on the air. Right now, there is little we can do to determine how successful any program series really is. We have the rating data which we get, however, only twice a year on a national level. We cannot afford to increase that purchase. We can, however, supplement those data with survey data based on a viewing panel. If we have such a panel, it would allow us to evaluate any program immediately after it is broadcast. Taking the difference of carriage into account, we would probably wait until the broadcast week was over to query our panel on their reactions. I cannot report on any of the details of the panel project because none have been worked out. There is a question for example of whether this panel should be PTV viewers or whether it should be a cross section sample. Obviously, there are advantages and disadvantages to both these sampling frames. Initial discussions on this project will be taking place with PBS in the very near future. By the way; CPB's relationship with PBS, at least in the research area, seem to be on a very cooperative basis. We have set up a Research Coordinating Committee (RCC for short) which meets at least once each month to exchange views on various subjects.

When I first arrived at CPB, I bemoaned the fact that there is no Public Broadcasting Library of data and writings on the subject. I even wrote a memo to that effect but nothing came of it. This coming year, I am taking the bull by the horns and have set aside some funds for setting up a historical archive of research data. I would hope that this will provide some impetus for the

rest of the Corporation to contribute some money to set up as complete a library as possible. One thought we had was to involve the NAEB in this effort, but this is still in the talking stage internally at CPB.

Before I open this up for questions from the floor, I would like to say a word about audience and what I am planning to do to get closer to a full analysis and perhaps some acceptable definitions. Frankly, I admit that I am somewhat concerned about getting the best measuring tool for identifying of the PTV viewer. I know that I don't have it now, but I also know that no one else has the magic formula. The one place where we can reconstruct our audience is from diaries -- either ARB or Nielsen. I prefer dealing with ARB on this one because I find that I get better cooperation from them. Also, ARB will allow interviewing of their diary households ten days after they have submitted their diaries. I do not believe Nielsen will allow that.

I would propose that we isolate the PTV viewers and non-viewers for any given time period (one week) and then interview these households -- actually using a covered household interview so that we can find out from every member of the family who is listed in the diary what their habits are without reference to the diary they have just filled out. With this kind of information, I believe we can shed more light on what makes a PTV viewer and also be able to construct a question series which would locate them without resorting to an excessive expenditure.

Now, I will take questions on this material or anything else anyone wants to bring up.